

# MECHANICAL MEMORIES MAGAZINE

ISSUE 1

APRIL 2006



**A new magazine promoting Mechanical Memories Museum.  
A monthly publication for collectors and anyone interested  
in vintage coin operated amusement machines.**

# Mechanical Memories Magazine

Mechanical Memories Magazine is a subscriber magazine published monthly, except August. When subscribing, please forward your **Name, Address and Telephone number** to the address below and make cheques payable to: Mechanical Memories Magazine

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## Annual Subscription (11 issues)

UK £22 inc. UK postage

Europe £28 inc. airmail

Rest of the world £36 inc. airmail

## Advertising Rates

Half Page £20.00

Full Page £35.00

Lineage ads., **For sale** or **Wanted**, are free to subscribers.

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# Editorial

Hello, and welcome to the very first issue of **Mechanical Memories Magazine**. Some of you will know that I've been considering starting a magazine for some time now, well here it is! Many thanks for the best wishes and encouragement so many of you have shown either by letter or e-mail. Thanks also to those of you who have advertised. I thought the ads. might be a bit sparse in the first few issues, but actually, there's some good stuff for sale. So keep the ads. coming in.

What's the magazine all about, what are its aims and who is for? Firstly, collectors of vintage slot machines have been without a regularly published magazine for a couple of years now. There are a number of excellent web-sites dedicated to the subject, but from the response and comments I've had from collectors, there is still a demand for a good old-fashioned pen and ink magazine, even if it is produced on a computer! And of course, not everyone has access to the internet, so this should be of value to all. I hope too, that the magazine will help to encourage newcomers. I remember when I first started collecting, I was very much 'on my own' with little knowledge; not knowing where to buy machines or what they were worth.

In addition, as many of you will know, I've been operating vintage slots for quite some time now, and have been running Mechanical Memories Museum, at Brighton, for the last four years. Many visitors have asked whether we produce a magazine or newsletter, so hopefully this will help to promote the museum. So whether you own (or aspire to own) a barn-full of machines or are content with just a few, then this magazine is the one for you!

When planning this first issue, I've tried to be mindful of what I would expect from a magazine if I were a subscriber, and someone else was producing it. I've given much consideration to content; what to include and what to omit. I hope I've achieved a good balance of content, but if there's anything you think could be included, or if there's anything you don't like, let me know. I've also given some thought to the layout of the magazine. For example, I've kept the bulk of the ads. to the back pages. I've also adopted a simple style; I've refrained from fancy fonts and borders. Rather, due to the relatively small A5 format, I feel a simple style works better. What do you think? If you have any comments or suggestions on any aspect of the magazine, tell me!

And finally, I hope as many of you as possible will make a contribution from time to time. An article on something that is of particular interest to you perhaps? And don't forget the *How I started my collection* feature. Anyway, I'm running out of space now.

Until next time, all the best

*Jerry*



# What's in store?

Over the coming months, I hope to include a varied selection of articles. Here's a look at some of the regular features that will be included either monthly or at least every few months.

## **The history of Mechanical Memories Museum.**

This is a long story, which goes back some thirty five years. There's a lot of detail that will probably take three issues to tell, or maybe four – I won't know till I write part three!

## **How I started my collection.**

This is the one for you, the subscribers; a chance to put pen to paper and tell us about your first machine, or how you started collecting: When; why; where; how – I'll leave it up to you, you get the general idea. But I do hope enough of you will write in, so I can make this a monthly feature.

## **Out and about.**

This is where I get out and about, visiting other collections, museums, penny arcades – anywhere that has penny slot machines for the public to play. If you like working models, I've got a great one lined up for the next issue.

## **Spotlight.**

Every month I shall feature one of the machines in MECHANICAL MEMORIES MUSEUM: how it works; history; manufacturer etc. I've got about fifty down there, so this series will probably run for some time!

## **Letters page.**

There's no letters page in this issue, for fairly obvious reasons! But this is one of the reasons I've started the magazine – to get collectors communicating. Maybe you've got a problem with a machine or would like some information on it's history. If I can't help, I'm sure someone out there can.

## **Reader's Wives page.**

Wow! Exciting eh? Well no, it's not what you think. This was my wife's idea, and I thought it might be amusing to hear our wives perspective on our collecting. Does she whinge and whine every time you come home with a lovely new machine? Or is she as obsessed with these relics from the past as we are? Sharron's written the first one, let's hear from your wives, girlfriends, lovers, mistresses.....



# **For Sale**

## **Wurlitzer 1015**

**The Classic of Classic Jukeboxes**  
**The quintessential and most**  
**recognisable jukebox ever.**  
**Absolutely immaculate condition.**

**Price £9000**

**Charlie 07711 978806**

## **Rare Machine for Sale**

**Le Aeronaute, French c.1908**

**Isis type upright dial gambling machine. Early Ballooning**  
**theme. All castings around glasses in the form of balloons**  
**with baskets hanging beneath. Offers over £1200**

**John 01273 608620**

# The History of the Wall Machine

## Part One – Drop Case Machines

In this series of articles, I shall be tracing the history and development of that broad genre of games - the Wall Machine, named as such simply because they were intended to be fixed to the walls of the establishments in which they were operated. Unique to Europe, wall machines were unknown in America, and as we progressed through the twentieth century (particularly after WWII, they were to become intrinsically British. Part one looks at the most basic gaming machine: Drop Case.

In 1687, Sir Issac Newton published his 'Principia Mathematica' and among other wonderous revelations determined that what goes up, must surely come down. Thus, Sir Issac provided us with the most basic of mechanisms for a slot machine: gravity! In it's most basic form, the drop case game could be found at fairgrounds, long before the advent of gaming machines. It consisted of a vertical playfield with a row of numbered columns at the bottom. The player would purchase a number of marbles from the showman and insert them, one by one, at the top. As the marbles dropped, they encountered a matrix of pins, thus deflecting them into the various numbered columns. The final score would determine whether or not a prize was awarded.

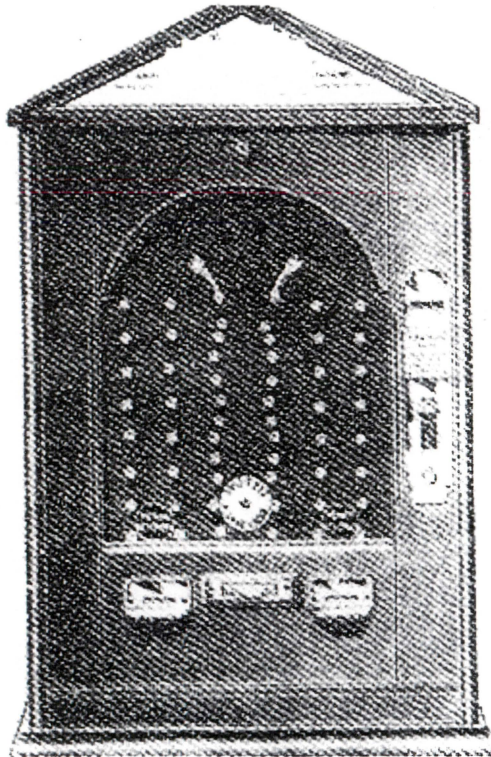
By substituting the marbles with the player's coin, you get instant slot machine! It's likely that very basic drop case machines like this existed in this country (probably 1880s), although I can find no record or information pertaining to such a device. In any case, they would have been short lived, as operating such a simple machine requiring the constant presence of an attendant (to award prizes) would hardly have advanced the cause of the automatics industry! Simple drop case games were common in America though, right up to the 1940s, and were operated as counter-top 'Trade Stimulators'. More about trade stimulators another time.

So, back to this country. Clearly, some form of automatic payout was required and this was achieved by Frank Urry's 1892 patent for the 'Tivoli'. The importance of this patent cannot be underestimated. Although there would be numerous wall machine games to follow, far more advanced and complex, the drop case machine would remain British arcades for over eight decades. It was to be a benchmark for all future machine design, particularly with respect to British gaming law.

The Tivoli was designed with a vertical playfield, with the coin entry positioned to one side about mid way between top and bottom. When a coin was inserted it would come to rest on a spring-loaded plunger. With the aid of an external trigger, the player would then fire his coin to the top of the play-field, when (as Newton predicted) the coin would fall. An arrangement of pins sub-divided the playfield into columns. If the coin took the central route, it would trigger a release mechanism and reward the player with a 'good cigar'. The player also had two chances of having his coin returned; otherwise his coin was lost. A really simple game? At first sight yes, but in addition to the automatic payout and the coin return, there are two important points that are all too often missed.

First, the trigger. Why bother? Why not just have the player insert his coin at the top of the machine and let it bounce around a few pins and find it's own path? Well, by allowing the player to fire his coin, he is deluded into thinking he has some control. And if he thinks he has control, he'll apply that old adage 'practice makes perfect'. This is the first rule of encouraging repeat play: 'let the punter think he can beat the machine'! In reality of course, the player has very little control, although with practice he would probably stand a better chance. The good news for the operator was that the amount of money a player would need to spend in order to get some sort of 'feel' with the trigger, would more than sufficiently pay for the odd 'good cigar' he might win!

Second, by giving the player 'control' it could be interpreted as 'skill'. This was to be an extremely important element in future machine design. As the automatics industry grew through the 1890s and into the twentieth century, the authorities became increasingly antagonistic toward games of chance.



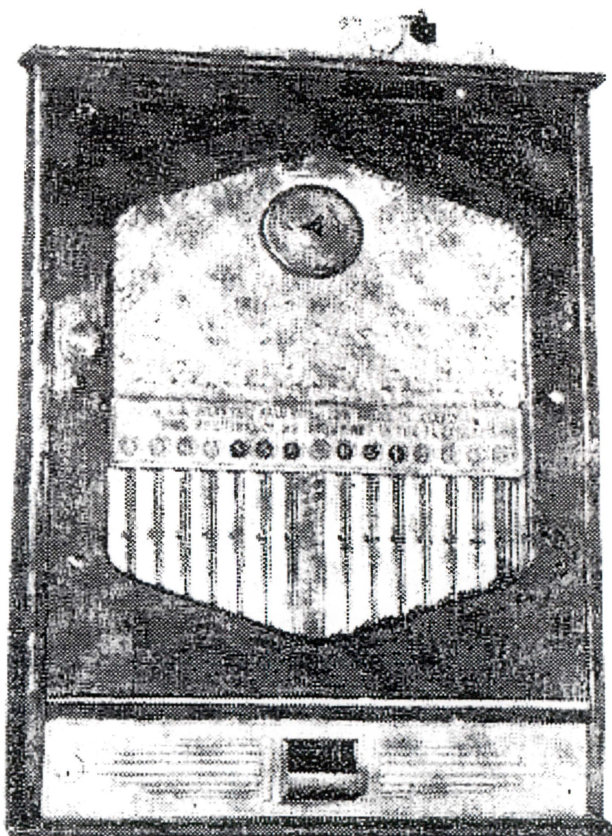
*Early Tivoli, Haydon and Urry Ltd c.1890s*



So, the Tivoli set the standard for future design of gaming wall machines. In order to be accepted as 'legal', a machine had to demonstrate a degree of 'skill'. The line between skill and chance was never clearly defined; neither would it have been easy to do so. The element of skill was certainly dubious in many machines to come.

As a measure of Tivoli's success, over forty patents relating to the game were taken out over almost as many years. But the game didn't drastically change; rather, it evolved. The cigar payout was replaced with a token payout quite early in the machine's development, and jackpots were to come later. It wasn't until the 1930s that a new drop case machine would oust everything that had gone before, and remain in British arcades for another forty years.

In 1931, Leslie Bradley in conjunction with The Perry Barr Metal Co. Ltd, took out patent No. 377316 for the *Challenger*. This was to be the second, and indeed the last, significant development in the Drop Case machine.



*Bradley's 1931 challenger (sorry this is such a crap picture – it's the best I could find)*

The Challenger consists of a row of columns at the bottom of the playfield, and the coin entry at the top. In addition, a 'flicker' is provided adjacent to the coin entry. At the top of the playfield, positioned centrally, is a triangular shaped wheel, which could be turned by the player by a knob to the left of the playfield. On inserting a penny, the player 'flicks' the coin into the wheel and turns the knob to deflect the coin into the playfield. The coin then drops, through a matrix of pins, into one of the columns. The columns are arranged such that the central column holds six coins, those adjacent hold five and the outermost hold four. When a column is full, the next coin triggers a release mechanism and that column pays out.

Just as so many other games perporting to require 'skill' to effect a payout, I've never been able to work out how there could possibly be any way a player could influence the outcome; it must surely be as random as throwing a dice! But just to convince the authorities further that this was an 'honest, players best friend' machine, displayed on the front of the machine, cast in solid aluminium are the words: 'ALL COINS THAT FALL INTO THE COLUMNS BELOW WILL EVENTUALLY BE RETURNED TO THE PLAYERS'. What it omits to say, is that the coin required to trigger the payout falls into the machines cashbox.

The Challenger is a masterpiece of psychological trickery! First, by allowing the player to propell his coin into the playfield with the triangular wheel, he is made to believe he can influence the coin's path. The best he can do is deflect the coin to the left or right side of the playfield. The coins path through the pins is entirely random. Second, when the machine pays out, the player is normally so 'chuffed' that he's won, he tends to forget the machine's swallowed his stake money!

As a testimoy to the Challengers' success, they were still being manufactured in the 1960s. By then these 'Super Challengers' were largely made of formica, rather than oak, but were basically exactly the same machine.

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## Mechanical Memories Museum

Just a reminder that I shall be open throughout the school holidays at Easter. So bring the kids down to sunny Brighton and pop in for a chat, I'll look forward to seeing you. If you've never been before, it's really easy to find. We're on the seafront, at beach level about 50 yards west of the Palace Pier.



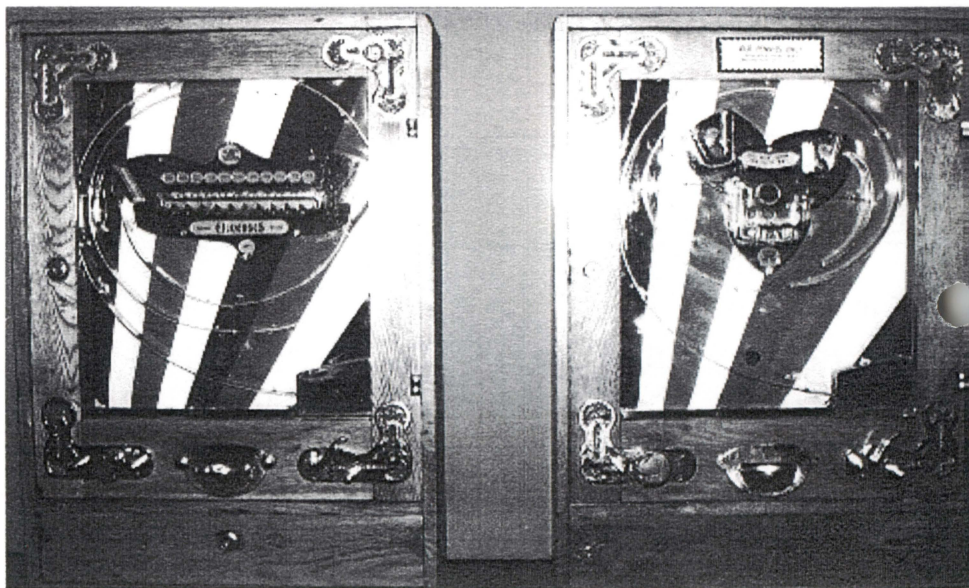
# Spotlight Bryan's Allwins

Each month in Spotlight, I shall be taking a closer look at one of the machines I have in the museum. This month it's actually two machines: Eleveses and gapwin.

Bryan's entered the Allwin market relatively late. Their heyday, the most innovative years, were undoubtedly the 1930s. Two machines in particular: Payramid (1934) and Allsport (1937) were still being manufactured in the 1970s. Few manufacturers of amusement machines, (or anything else come to that), could boast such longevity of product. When they did start to produce allwins, they did so in typical Bryan's fashion.

Unlike others of the era, particularly Oliver Whales and Wondermatics, Bryan produced a very small range of Allwins (just six between 1953 - 1956), but all unique and individual. The range comprised: Fivewin (1954); Eleveses (1955); Pilwin (1953 and later version 1956); Ten cup (1956); U Win (1956) and Gapwin (1956). The two I have in the museum are: the most common (Eleveses) and the best (Gapwin).

Bryan's advertising literature always boasted '**Bryan's Machines are so different**', and William Bryan certainly didn't forget his own slogan when designing his Allwins. The first machine in the range was 'Pilwin Play' and was no doubt the test bed for future design and improvement; a chance to evaluate the Allwin's short comings and inherent design flaws (the basic design of Allwins hadn't changed for forty years).



*Bryans Eleveses and Gapwin in Mechanical Memories Museum*



*Elevenes* at first sight appears a fairly simple machine, with an inviting eleven win cups. However, behind it's benign exterior lies a masterpiece of mechanical ingenuity. It was the first machine to utilise Bryan's 'universal mechanism' and was to become the biggest selling Allwin ever. A number of refinements were made, including the payout assembly; the spring-loaded coin tube was intended to be jam free. But, there were two aspects of the mechanism that would set Bryan's Allwins apart from all others, and ensure they remained in production for over three decades.

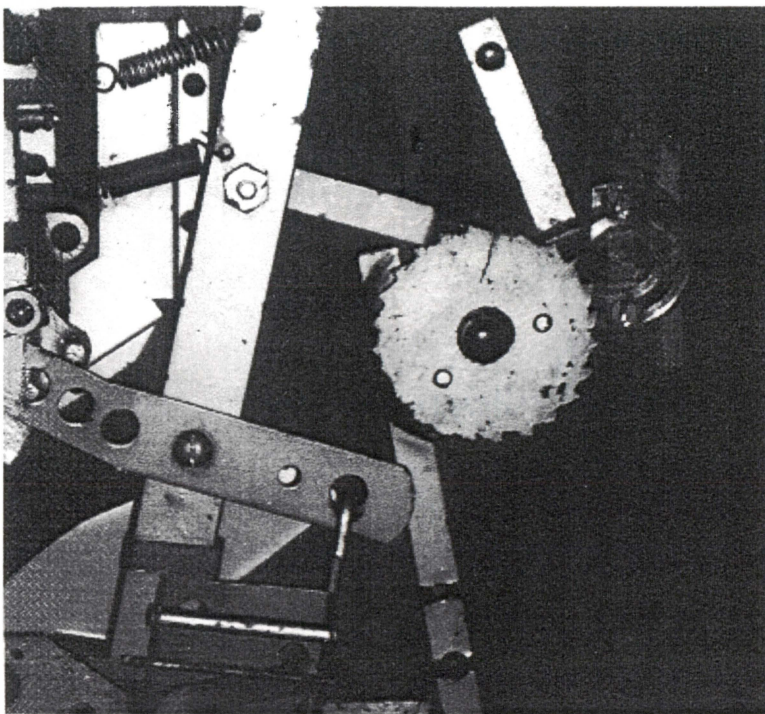
**Variable Payout.** During the 1950s, multi-payout Allwins became increasingly popular, with some paying out as many as twelve pennies. The common mechanism for effecting payouts was an arrangement whereby a number of ball levers were mounted on the payout control arm. A winning ball would land on the top ball-lever, thus releasing the control arm and allowing the player to turn the payout knob. When the knob had been turned and the control arm returned, the ball then dropped to the next ball lever, thus repeating the process. For a 2-4-6 payout, for instance, a 6 win would require the player to turn the payout knob three times; each turn paying two pennies. If an operator wanted to alter the payouts on a machine, he was somewhat limited in his options. He could reduce payouts by removing one or more ball levers and changing the graphics on the machine's backflash. If he wanted to increase payouts (to make the machine more appealing) there was little (well actually, there was nothing) he could do.

William Bryan cast all this aside, and came up with a brilliant variable payout system, which the operator could change at will. Rather than have a winning ball drop down a series of ball levers, the ball drops into one of three chutes. The ball landing in the first chute allows the player to turn the payout knob once. However, when the ball lands in the second chute, after the payout knob is turned the ball will then roll into the first chute, thus allowing another payout. A winning ball landing in the third chute will allow the payout knob to be turned three times. All eleven win cups can be set so that a winning ball will allow the payout knob to be turned just once. But by the flick of a lever behind the ball gallery, a winning ball in the centre cup will be directed into the third chute, thus paying out three times. In addition, there are two cups (one either side of the centre cup), which directs the ball into the second chute, thus paying out twice.

To complete the flexibility, machines were provided with inter-changeable payout slides; the standard slide paying out two pennies but a thicker slide pays out three, and a thinner slide just one. The operator can change these slides, very quickly, without the aid of tools.

So, the operator could have: a 1-2-3 payout; a 2-4-6 payout; a 3-6-9 payout or all winning balls paying the same amount, which could be set at 1,2,3,4,6 or 9 pennies. Even the numbers displayed above the win holes, behind the gallery shield, are taken care of. They are printed on the four faces of a long square block, which is clipped in from behind the playfield. One face has the 1-2-3 payouts, another has the 2-4-6 and another has 2 for every winning hole. The forth face reads 'win' for every hole, so that the operator can set the number of pennies paid out.

To say that William Bryan put a lot of thought into this design would be an understatement!



*A close-up view of the ratchet wheel, with cam behind (out of view) which creates the variable tension on the hammer spring.*

**Variable Hammer Tension.** With practice, it was always possible for a player to increase his chances of firing a winning shot by the degree with which he depressed the trigger before releasing it. William Bryan over-came this problem with a simple but ingenious method of varying the tension on the hammer spring. The normally anchored end of the spring is, instead, fixed to a lever operated by a cam. The cam is formed on the rear of a ratchet wheel, operated by the payout control arm. Each time the payout knob is turned, the ratchet wheel advances a couple of notches; the cam moving the lever a short distance and thus increasing or decreasing the tension on the hammer spring. Through a complete turn of the ratchet wheel, the tension on the spring is varied considerably.

*Gapwin* is a brilliant game within a game. Rather than a series of winning holes or cups, there is just one larger cup. However, this is blocked by two 'gates', which must be opened before the ball has access to the winning cup, and therefore effect a payout. When the game starts (with both gates closed) a winning ball will open the first gate. The ball is then returned to the player, who must fire another winning shot in order to open the second gate. If he does this, the large winning cup is exposed, thus a third win will pay out. When the payout knob is turned, the gates reset. At first sight this may appear to be a



long-winded way of winning a couple of pennies! But there is a wonderful psychology here. If the player loses on his first ball, the game is over; just as any other allwin. But what if he opens the first gate, should he play-on, or walk away? And if he then opens the second gate, thus leaving the win cup exposed, it would be a crime to walk away at this stage! If the player were to walk away, the next person to see the machine is bound to try his luck. What a brilliant way to encourage repeat play; either way, the machine wins!

In 1961, Bryans produced three more, quite complex allwins: 3 ball 7win; 3 ball 9 win and 3 ball folks. But for my money, gapwin beats them all!

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# Coming Events

## Brighton Jukebox Show. Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> April.

This will be the second year the show has been held at Brighton racecourse. I was unable to make it last year, but back in the Copthorne days it was always an enjoyable show. There will be a live band on both days, children's entertainment, food & drink and a bar. All the usual goodies will be on offer: Jukeboxes (obviously); coin-op; pinball; records; 50s, 60s, 70s retro etc. Jez Darvil will have his stall at the show, and as usual, will have a good selection of finely restored slots for sale. He will also be promoting this magazine for me, so make sure you stop by and have a chat. I understand the organisers are offering free entry for classic American car owners plus a guest, but you have to display your car! You can e-mail any enquiries about the show to: [jukeboxshow@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jukeboxshow@hotmail.co.uk)

## Southern Counties Auction of Vintage Slot Machines. Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May.

This is the one to look forward to! Those of you who were at last year's auction will agree it was a great success. At the time, we all assumed it would be a one-off. The auction was organised by a number of collectors/operators who hired the venue and the auctioneer with various staff, porters etc. which resulted in a very professionally run event. Southern counties no doubt noted it's success, and decided to repeat it this year. Hopefully, it will become an annual event. They are accepting entries for the auction until 27<sup>th</sup> April and you can do everything through the pennymachines web site. If you are not online, then telephone Southern Counties Auctions on 01722 321215 for further information. Info. from: [www.pennymachines.co.uk/SCAuctions/SCAuction.htm](http://www.pennymachines.co.uk/SCAuctions/SCAuction.htm)

## Mechanical Music and Technical Apparatus. Christies, Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> May

This bi-annual sale at Christies, South Kensington, covers a fairly broad range of collector interests including: musical boxes and automata; phonograph and gramophones; early radios and even a few slot machines. Talking to Laurence Fisher recently, he told me that the remainder of the Costa collection will be offered at this sale (at lower reserves). Those of you who were at the Nic Costa auction in January will remember a good number of lots didn't reach their reserves, so there may be a few bargains this time! Certainly worth taking a trip to London if you're free.

e-mail enquiries to: [lfisher@christies.com](mailto:lfisher@christies.com) or telephone 020 7752 3278



# The history of Mechanicals

## Part 1 – The early days

As a child, Clive Baker was fascinated by slot machines. His family would take a torturous three and a half hours trip to their nearest seaside resort – Skegness. He and his brother would play the machines on the pier for a penny or halfpenny a go. In the centre of the arcade there was a square stall, on which stood about ten one armed bandits from the 1920s, all painted black. In those days, before the 1960 betting and gaming act, the machines of pure chance were illegal and a showman found operating them faced fourteen days in gaol!

The other pier Clive visited as a child was Eastbourne. At the age of twelve, a school friend invited Clive to stay with him at his aunt's house. The two boys would be on the pier as soon as it opened, to play the machines. A few cast iron machines were situated outside the arcade building, on the pier decking. Clive remembers one of these machines in particular: the Full Team Footballer, which had twenty-two little football players all kitted out in tiny striped knitted jumpers. Clive now owns that machine, and operates it in his penny arcade on Southport pier.

In 1971, Clive moved to Loughborough, and married. This was the age of flower-power and Head Shops. Loughborough's Head Shop interested Clive because beside the incense, smock coats and hand printed posters, it stocked an assortment of recently obsolete penny slot machines (remember this was 1971, the year of decimalisation). One of these machines looked especially familiar: a black one-armed bandit. Clive made enquiries and was not surprised to learn it had come from Skegness pier, so he bought it.

The shop's owner was John Hayward, a former art student. He, like Clive, had a fascination for old slot machines, and in addition to running the head shop, used to take a few machines on a small stall to steam fairs. John didn't drive, so his dad drove him and his stall to the fairs. Clive had a car, so one day he and John took a drive to Clacton, in search of some more machines. They found some large arcade pieces from the 1920s (machines weren't difficult to come by in those days). Clive lived in a council flat and had no storage space, but John's dad, in addition to owning a car, had a garden shed, so the machines were stored there.

The years passed and the collection of slot machines grew. The Head Shop was demolished and John was unemployed. Clive had moved to Southampton, and on a day trip to the Isle of Wight, he and John found an empty building at the end of Shanklin pier. The pier was owned by a Mr Sage (it was rumoured he paid just £1 for it, due to it's dilapidated and uninsurable condition). Thomas Sage liked a drink and, as the pier bar was open all day, was a happy man. The amusements, situated half way along the pier, were operated by Billy Manning. The vacant building at the end of the pier may have originally been a concert hall, but was last used as a roller-skating rink. Clive enquired of

# al Memories Museum

the twenty visitors sunning themselves around the outside of the building whether they would buy old pennies and play on old slot machines if a museum were set up there. Seventeen out of twenty said yes, so John and Clive drew up a plan and revisited Mr Sage. He agreed to their proposal and set a rent, but warned them not to tell Billy Manning. They thought this odd, as visitors would have to pass through Manning's arcade in order to reach them, so they sought Billy's blessing. Now, it's not known what Billy Manning's drinking habits were, but he certainly didn't spend all day in the pier bar! So, unlike Sage, he was not a happy man, and was even less happy when he heard John and Clive's plans. "Over my dead body" was his reply, and when Sage heard of it, John and Clive were ordered off the pier!

Inspired by their survey, John and Clive actively sought another site. John advertised in the *Worlds Fair* "Unusual attraction seeking a venue." Apart from a few enquiries "Is the unusual attraction a stripper?" they had only one response: the pier at Birnbeck island, Weston-Super-Mare. The owner was John Critchley, a colourful businessman who promoted his pier as a motor museum. He had purchased the structure basically as a safe location on which to store his collection of vintage cars. It was indeed ideal for this



*The National Museum of Penny Slot Machines, Birnbeck Pier 1979*



purpose as the cars were garaged in the former ballroom, with adequate protection from the elements, so long as they were parked between the buckets placed for catching the leaks from the roof!

The pier master, Mike Mercado, lived in the tollhouse, and doubled as the entertainer at the 'Mediaeval Banquets' held in the bar. It was a role to which he was eminently suited, having had a Top Ten hit in the 1950s as the *The Singing Monk*. (In fact he made another recording entitled *The Birnbeck Pier Blues*, but it didn't make the charts). Accompanying himself on an electronic organ, he would sing such favourites as *Roll out the Barrel*, incongruously dressed in a purple silk monk's habit. At closing time he was frequently carried out in a wheelbarrow, by Nigel the handyman and the Brummie bar manager. They unceremoniously dumped him at the tollhouse, where he lay undisturbed till he sobered-up. (He was kept company by the Alsatian guard dogs, and they were not house trained)!

Mike had assured John and Clive that they would have 1500 visitors on a Sunday. The word of a monk was good enough, but in the event Clive doubts whether they had more than 1500 visitors in the entire 1979 season. The couple running the *bric a brac* stall had also been given the same visitor estimate when they signed up.

John and Clive chose the name 'National Museum of Penny Slot Machines' and waited for the 85% of visitors on the pier to come into their arcade. At most, one in seven actually did. So much for market research! The year was a complete disaster. On opening, they invested £60 on a caravan for John to live in at nearby Sandy Bay. Clive underwrote the season, and it cost over £1000. John ended up with nothing. Clive did everything to drum up business, including walking along the Weston esplanade wearing a sandwich board and handing out Free Admission leaflets. (The 15p admission charge would be refunded in old pennies). But people were baffled: they'd already been on the pier and hadn't seen the museum. "Which pier?" Clive asked. "THE pier" they replied. "No, not the Grand Pier; we're on Birnbeck Pier – it's out of sight, round the headland." This usually served to confirm their impression of Clive's mental state, but some foolhardy souls would trek out beyond the end of the prom, past the derelict apartments, and finally locate the mythical "other pier."

That year Birnbeck was run on a shoestring. There were just four employees: Mike the Monk; the Brummie bar manager and his wife, and Nigel the handyman. Between them they ran the pier from 10 a.m. until the early hours of the morning.

Birnbeck pier was still visited by the 'Booze cruise' ships from Cardiff. It was the time when certain districts of South Wales were still 'dry' on Sundays, and the ferry to Weston allowed drinkers to start supping on the way over, disembark on Birnbeck island, remain in the pier bar all day and then drink all the way home. Unfortunately, the vessel's captain, John Gunn (who also liked a tipple) rammed his boat into the landing stage, and that was the end of the ferry trips. Nigel promptly dismantled the landing stage to use as planks to replace the rotting decking on the main pier.

As John and Clive vacated at the end of the 1979 season, they met the new tenants, full of optimism. The mad monk had worked his miracle again!

**Next month – The National Museum of Penny Slot Machines moves to Brighton.**



# How I started my collection

As this is the first issue, I thought I should start the ball rolling. As I've stated on page 4, I shall leave the theme of this feature fairly open-ended. It's up to you what you write about. I've chosen my entire life history! So here goes....

My fondest childhood memories are of the fair coming to town. And the seaside. You're probably already ahead of me – where do you find slot machines? Anyway, I suppose my earliest memories are of the fair, this would be the early 1960s. Our local showmen were the Forrest/Bailey family, who actually had their yard in Dartford town centre, behind Marks & Spencer (that's long gone; their yard and Marks & Spencer)! The fair in those days came to Central Park in June, and I used to look forward to this just as much as Christmas, maybe even more. The major attractions at the fair were: Forrests' Dodgems, Gallapies and occasionally the Chairoplanes; Baileys' Motorcycle Speedway Ark, Skid and Big Wheel; and Mrs Hodson's Octopus and Arcade. Now, I'd love to tell you more about the rides; about Forrests' wonderful Lang Wheels Dodgem Track (did you know these tracks were a monstrous ninety six feet long; the biggest and heaviest tracks ever travelled in this country, or anywhere else I should imagine). Sorry, I got a bit carried away there, this is supposed to be about slot machines! So, Mrs Hodson's Arcade. As a very young child, my parents would not allow me to enter this dreadful place, with all those wicked, evil machines. It was not until the mid to late sixties that I would venture inside and marvel at all those wonderful machines. I remember the Bryans' Allwins, with their distinctive striped backflashes, but I cannot remember any of the other wall machines, which is a great shame because there were probably some real treasures there. In the centre of the arcade were two rows of Arcadian Bandits, back to back. At the time, these would have been very modern machines. At the back was a huge Cromptons pusher called 'Teeter'. I came across one of these a few years back; somehow it didn't seem as big! In addition to the Arcadians, there were a few older bandits at the front of the arcade. Looking back now, they were probably Hi-tops. Anyway this was my first introduction to slot machines.

So, what about the seaside? In those days my dad didn't own a car, so we used to travel to the Kent coast by train. There was an exception to the Kent coast, and that was trips to Southend. Now, Southend, in Essex, isn't the easiest of places to visit by train from Dartford, in Kent – (The Thames is a bit in the way)! So how did we get there? This was the most wonderful daytrip a child could possibly imagine. We would take a bus to Gravesend and then the paddle-steamer, 'Daffodil' which disembarked at the end of Southend Pier. Then the electric train down the one and a half miles of pier to the promenade. When we got to the shore, the greatest place on earth to visit – the Kursaal Pleasure Gardens (now a housing estate). Wow, what a treat! I'd better stop now, or I'll start going-on about fairground stuff again.

Of the various Kent coast destinations we'd visit, my favourite was Margate. Dreamland was exactly what it said it was: a true land of dreams. I don't remember playing slot machines in Dreamland, there were too many other wonderful rides to ride

on. The place to go to play slot machines was Margate's 'Sun Deck' (now demolished), which was like a very wide pier. The machines I remember include: Bryan's Bullions and Fruit Bowls; Street's Rifle Range; R&W Ice Hockey; Crompton's Tuti-Frutis and I think it was on the Sun Deck that I first came across those weird bandits cased in blue and yellow formica. Instead of reels, they had three valves, each with ten filaments which when they glowed displayed the numbers 0 – 9. Even as a boy, I thought they were bloody ugly! But my favourite machine was a driving game. This was a little bigger than a Hockey Table. Under the top glass was a car, about the same size as a Dinky, which was driven on a continuous belt, on which was printed the winding roadway. In addition to the steering wheel (to steer the car, obviously), the player could control the speed by the three speed column change gear stick. Does anyone remember this machine?

Anyway, the years passed and I suppose it would have been the early to mid '70s that I started to notice the old machines were fast disappearing. I thought it might be a good idea to start collecting them. But I did nothing. More years passed, and I was often tempted by ads. in the 'Worlds Fair' and 'Coin Slot' but still did nothing. And then in the early '90s I began to come to terms with the fact that I would never own a set of Gallopers or a Burrell Showmans' Engine, so I decided collecting slot machines would be a more realistic option.

My first machine wasn't actually an amusement machine; it was a wooden five-column cigarette vender. It's a nice little machine, which I still have and will probably keep. I bought it in an antiques shop in Greenwich (which is no longer there; it was demolished to make way for the tube station, for the Millenium Dome). I chatted with the shop's proprietor, and he said "I've got something that might interest you." He disappeared out the back, and returned with a big pile of Costa's books 'Automatic Pleasures'. I bought one for £10, but wish I'd bought the whole lot – the rest were probably dumped when they demolished the shop!

Anyway, a few years passed and the collection grew, and what started as an interest became more a vocation. I first started operating machines eight years ago at 'Draper's museum of bygones' (which, you guessed it, is no longer there) in Rochester. Here I had about twenty, mainly wall machines, on the second floor. (Not an ideal site for a Waltonian!) Later that year (1998) John Hayward announced he was selling 'Remember When', on Hastings Pier. I met John on the pier with a view to buying a few machines (which I did) but ended up with the arcade! My brief time on the pier was a complete disaster, but more of that another time.

Then in 2001, John approached me and asked if I would be interested in taking over Mechanical Memories Museum in Brighton, as he was about ready to retire and didn't want to see it close. With not so fond memories of Hastings still in my mind, I declined. However, I too didn't want to see it close and with my engineering business in decline, I agreed with John the following year to run the museum from Easter. Since then I've aquired other sites and am now publishing a magazine!

So, there we have the life story of a Slottie! People sometimes ask if operating machines and earning a living from them has changed my love and enthusiasm for these wonderful amusements from the past. Absolutely not! And would I swop all my machines for a set of Gallopers? No, I wouldn't. But if I were to win the lottery.....



# Readers' Wives

*By Sharron Chattenton*

Hello all,

Before I continue with this and maybe end up getting hate-mail for not over-indulging in your passion for all things slottie, let me thank you all for the support you've shown Jerry and this magazine. Particular thanks to Dave Lavender and that strange man from Essex, otherwise known as Charlie Booth.

Well, I guess Jerry has been collecting for getting on 15 years and in the beginning I even joined in. After the first auction I was banned from holding the bidding number as my shopping gene kept taking over and I was going to have that machine no matter what. It was a lot easier to hold up a card than physically fight with another woman in a shop over a pair of shoes neither of us particularly wanted but wouldn't let the other have. Realisation soon dawned – no 28 day statutory rights period to return my goods and exchange them for something else that my heart desired. Another problem seemed to be that the auctions were on Sundays and you had to view at a ridiculous time in the morning. How can you do that sensibly after being out until the early hours the night before? I know dedicated slotties were probably in bed at 7.30pm the night before but it just wasn't us. Remember the good old days at Saffron Walden? Where everyone that had had a drink the night before would gather in that nice café and have breakfast. And then over the pub when it opened at 12.00! I remember one auction which I didn't attend a couple of years ago. Jerry kept in touch as he always does and called me before he left for home. He was very pleased with his purchases; so pleased that at the Petrol station he forgot he was driving a diesel van and filled it with petrol! That cost a few more pounds to put right. What a plonker! – You see, these machines and the whole slottie world get into your brain and you can't think about normal things. My belief is that they take you somewhere during your first auction and brainwash you – probably the back of Charlie's an! Anyway, Jerry's collection started to grow and he could often be found in a quiet corner reading another book about machines. Jerry started selling the spares for Allwins and mending the odd machine and he hasn't looked back.

I think what really made me start to dislike the machines was that fateful day in Hastings. Jerry received a call to say the Pier had gone into receivership and there was the most awful storm there. We rushed down to take machines off the pier and return them home to safety. I may not like them very much but am aware of their value – no baliff was getting his hands on them without a fight. Anyway, before we even got near the pier I started to notice bits of wood in the road and over the beach. The waves were reaching the other side of the road and the wind was petrifying (and that was just Jerry). As we drew closer we realised the wood had come from the pier and it had two gapping

holes, which the sea was pounding through. The pier was shaking, the rain lashing down and it was dark in the middle of the day. It was a frightening experience. Dodging the holes we started taking machines out and a friend with a hi-hab lorry came to our rescue for the larger stuff. I did think it might be the end of the pier altogether when the lorry drove on. I remember standing soaking wet, freezing cold and physically shaking with exhaustion. The machines all returned home and this is where my dislike for them really started to fester. Not straight away but they slowly ground me down. Machines were everywhere – you literally could not move. The cat was quite happy – he even moved into a couple of the bigger machines and loved chasing balls around in the Hi-ball. The men in my house had turned against me – they enjoyed having the machines there. We couldn't have anyone around, the machines were smelly (that horrible musty smell) and a couple of them would inexplicably make noises at unexpected intervals. Small children wanted to come to the house and play the machines, Jerry demanding 50p entrance on the doorstep and frightening our elderly neighbours with cries of 'Roll up, Roll up'. Neighbours would twitch their curtains wondering what on earth Jerry was bringing home next. They had finally taken over my life and my house.

A while later John Hayward decided to take things easy and Jerry took over Mechanical Memories in Brighton. Great – most of the machines left home and started earning a living. There was a catch though. Unless I went to Brighton during school holidays and most weekends I wouldn't see my husband. I persevered for a while and made the journey most weekends but the novelty of listening to that bloody laughing sailor soon wore off. Does anyone out there know what I mean? I could easily take an axe to his head. What a creepy machine! It's not entertainment; it's a very slow form of torture. The only laugh I've had around one of those was the one Jerry has at the Hop Farm. Someone dutifully put their money in and it started laughing – I glared over in its direction and its trousers started slowly falling down. I didn't want it fixed but Jerry couldn't be around all day just to hoist his trousers up before the next customer arrived. I have promised Jerry that should he go before me, I will bury a laughing sailor with him before selling the collection and becoming a merry widow cruising around the World. Surely the machines can hold their value better than our endowment policy has?

There are fewer machines indoors now and Jerry thinks he's doing well keeping them out of sight. Three years ago I compromised again and let him build a workshop – for engineering purposes. This workshop could happily house an indoor football match and my poor garden has shrunk beyond all comprehension. What's the workshop filled with? You guessed it, machines, more machines and various crapphernalia for machines. (Sorry made up a word there – it happens when I get wound up).

The long and short of it is that I won't leave Jerry or divorce him for his hobby. Not many of us are lucky enough to be able to make a living from something we enjoy so much. I guess all of you are preserving a piece of history and that's something lots of us won't do in our lives. He knows the rules now and keeps machines away from me in case I run them over with the Hoover in a temper fit. My hobbies? I'm quite happy at home with a settled family life and my work. Would like to travel the world more but my husband is always in Brighton, so stand-in required particularly in the summer months.



That reminds me actually – another auction coming up soon. Hope he buys some machines and I can spend the equivalent on a little spring break to Cyprus... See it's a chicken and egg situation after all. No machines, no holidays! Perhaps I like them more than I care to admit.

I hope that some of you long suffering partners will write in – particularly you Miranda, with stories of your other half's collecting habits, mishaps and even dare I say it, bargains. It's nice to hear the other side of the coin for a change.

Once again, thank you for your support and keep those adverts coming in. Remember that a whole page ad. will pay for a completely impractical pair of holiday shoes.

All the best

 *harron.*

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